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Authorship in multi-disciplinary, multi-national North-South research projects: Issues of equity, capacity and accountability

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Abstract

The challenges of ensuring equity among partners of very different academic power and status, across continents, within complex research projects involving differing disciplines with their own norms, and balancing needs for capacity development of individuals and for institutions can be major sources of conflicts. While each of these concerns has been addressed separately, the implications of situations where they reinforce each other have not. Drawing on experience in four complex, multi-partner and multi-disciplinary social science research projects, I consider four main overlapping issues:

1. The structural inequalities inherent in North-South relationships as well as between junior and senior researchers and how these raise difficult problems for research managers.
2. The implications of different kinds of local institutions, and of seeing authorship as a major feature of capacity building, even if no funding is allocated to the task within research grants.
3. The effects of multi-disciplinarity: how intellectual property is understood in different disciplinary settings as well as embodied in national or institutional rules, and the implications of these differences in the context of the pressures imposed by institutional review procedures, in particular the Research Excellence Framework in the UK.
4. The challenges to research managers of ensuring that transaction costs do not swamp the possibility of achieving real intellectual additionalities, and how to address the risk that the costs of collaboration outweigh the likely benefits.

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Authorship in multi-disciplinary, multi-national North-South research projects: Issues of equity, capacity and accountability

Introduction

This paper addresses the interactions amongst four overlapping challenges to research and publishing in studies involving the Global South. The first is the North-South divide.¹ As Salager-Meyer puts it, ‘The scientific world, divided into the ‘haves’ (the industrialized world) and the ‘have-nots’ (the developing world), is remarkably unequal in terms of volume and output’ (Salager-Meyer, 2008: 122; see also Canagarajah, 1996). But as she continues, there is considerable variability within the Global South. The cultural capital of scientists is unequally distributed between and within countries, according to residence, discipline and employment and – for many writers most importantly – to familiarity with academic English (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Various attempts have been made to address these issues. For example, AuthorAid attempts to develop extended relationships between Southern authors and experienced mentors (Freeman & Robbins, 2006: 202; see also on Globelics, Muchie, 2006: 7, cited in Teichler & Yağcı, 2009). In *Compare*, a mentoring programme was instituted in 2007-08 and continues until the present. A review in 2010 concluded that ‘there was evidence of the impact of the programme on participants’ confidence and understanding of the writing processes involved in developing an article for publication’ as well as an improvement in the proportion of articles submitted by authors in the target category were eventually approved for publication (Lillis, Magyar & Robinson-Pant, 2010: 795). Despite efforts of this kind, several reports suggest that disparities between the shares in publications and citations of the leading nations (US, Europe and Japan) and the rest in science and in health-related fields are increasing (King, 2004; Paraje, Sadana, & Karam, 2005).

Earlier writers in this tradition imply that academic writing is an individual skill: there has been a ‘predominant focus on individual competence in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and academic writing research and pedagogy more widely’ (Lillis & Curry 2010: 61). Much of the discussion of EAP is influenced by issues concerning English as a Lingua Franca, related to discussions of Languages for Specific Purposes. This has led to EAP being promoted for writing papers in heterogeneous writing

groups. But researchers in such groups – specialists in their own fields – ‘use English consciously as a tool, simply to do a job, with little interest in the language itself or ambition to perfect their language skills to any native-speakerlike degree.’ (Charles; 2011:29). They may not see a need to improve their EAP, preferring to use native-speaker assistance (Ammon, 2006).

In contrast, Casanave, like others, suggests that the ability to write academic articles arises from the apprentice-like relationships that Lave and Wenger (1991) call ‘situated peripheral participation’ (Casanave, 1998: 176-7).² In other words, social networks – social capital – are crucial:

‘network participation enables the mobilization of resources that are essential for English-medium publication, particularly in ‘high status’ English-medium journals: these include making connections with others; obtaining information and research/bibliographic materials; collaborating on research and writing; receiving rhetorical/linguistic support; getting help with responding to feed-back from gatekeepers; and securing publishing opportunities (Curry & Lillis, 2010: 282).

Lillis and Curry (2010) carried out a longitudinal study of academic writing for publication with 50 European psychologists and educationalists. Their detailed analysis of text histories emphasises the importance of viewing the production of academic texts as a networked activity with complex relations around text production as well as differential access to the necessary (material and linguistic) resources. Curry and Lillis (2010) focus on ‘how scholars gain access to and participate in different types of networks, and what publications—in particular, English-medium—result from such participation’ (2010: 283). My purpose here, rather, is to consider the picture from the side of the principal investigators, who support such participation and mentor the resulting outputs.

The second challenge is posed by the variations in the kinds of institutions in the South with which Northern universities and research institutes collaborate. In some countries, the additional opportunities offered by consultancies and independent think-tanks have led to the ‘hollowing out’ of University departments. Either individuals have resigned entirely, or they carry out their research activities through NGOs set up expressly for this purpose. In other countries, universities remain the natural partners for research collaborations. In consortia in which I have been a member, these differences have manifested

themselves in different arrangements for hiring junior staff. In one African university, we were surprised to find the academic staff doing basic data collection, since this allowed them to enhance their unsatisfactory university salaries; in South Asia, by contrast, junior staff were hired for data collection purposes. These inconsistencies across countries added further complexities to decisions about who had made sufficient contributions to the research to be accorded the status of ‘authors’.

The third challenge is posed by disciplinary variation. Although individual disciplines are often identified, the systematic differences among disciplines has not received due attention. In some disciplines the norm is for articles and conference papers to be multi-authored; in others the norm is for single-authored pieces. These differences are significant. Curry and Lillis studied academics in the fields of education and psychology, and noted that networks seem to be stronger in psychology than in education; they do not discuss whether the authors they studied worked in multi-disciplinary networks (Curry & Lillis, 2010: 293). In multi-disciplinary networks, there is a myriad of possible combinations, and these all raise specific challenges. For example, anthropology and history ‘fetishize’ the single-authored monograph, whereas for most natural scientists such an output has very low significance. Disciplines also vary in how far they are interested in ‘the local’ rather than presumed universal findings. For anthropology and history, in particular, locality may be the ground for claims of originality, and authors from or based in such a locale may find their contributions are valued on this basis, though Lillis and Curry (2006) argue that, even in ‘journals whose paradigms embrace qualitative socially situated research ... research emanating from non-Anglophone sites is ‘marked’ whereas studies emanating from Anglophone centres are ‘unmarked’ and thus given more credence’ (cited in Lillis, Magyar & Robinson-Pant, 2010: 783; see also Appadurai, 1995). Even more issues arise, then, when international collaborations are also multi-disciplinary.

Gibbons et al. (1994) contrast Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production. The first of these, Mode 1, was characterised ‘by the hegemony of theoretical or, at any rate, experimental science; by an internally-driven taxonomy of disciplines; and by the autonomy of scientists and their host institutions’. The second, Mode 2, was ‘socially distributed, application-oriented, trans-disciplinary, and subject to multiple accountabilities’ and was beginning to transcend Mode 1 forms (Nowotny, Scott, &

Gibbons, 2003: 179). In reflecting on the impact of the book 10 years later, three of the authors pointed to how certain disciplines had picked up the implications of this for authorship: some nurses, for example, noted that ‘inherent in the very notion of ‘Mode 2’ (or socially distributed knowledge), is the idea that this cannot be authoritatively encoded in traditional forms of scholarly publication’ (Nowotny et al., 2003: 180). Yet in many disciplines on the borders between knowledge production Mode 1 and Mode 2 there remain battles over which form of publication is most valuable (Woods, Youn, & Johanson, 2010).

The fourth challenge arises from the specific contest of the public culture that frames much contemporary research. In restating their claims in 2003, Nowotny et al pointed to the increasing attempts – internationally, nationally and at systemic levels – to channel research in particular directions; the commercialisation or increasing ‘engagement’ of research, and growing pressures by universities to gain rewards from the intellectual property of their staff; and the ‘audit culture’ associated in the UK with the Research Assessment Exercise³ but with wider ramifications (Nowotny et al., 2003: 181-4; see also Strathern, 2000).

In taking their discussion further, Nowotny et al identify the rise – not just in science but in social science as well – of ‘trans-disciplinarity’, by which is meant ‘the mobilization of a range of theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies to solve problems’ (Nowotny et al., 2003: 186). Nowotny et al say very little about how such ‘trans-disciplinary’ teams negotiate everyday solutions to working together. Secondly, they notice that Mode 2 research is enhanced by the use of new information and communication technologies to transform research communities so that they are not constrained by issues of distance. But they do not reflect on the power differentials that remain unexamined: not just the trans-national differentials, but also those posed by the different status and reach of some disciplines compared to others. In discussing globalisation, Novotny et al focus on integration and distribution of knowledge, on the rapidity of transfers, and not on unequal power relationships. Perhaps this is part of what Sandra Harding has identified as a failure of Science and Technology Studies to grapple with the insights of post-colonial studies (see, for example Harding, 2008). Within post-colonial discourses, issues have been raised such as where outputs are published as well as who is identified as owning the

intellectual property involved in the publication. Harding suggests that researchers from the Global North have followed an exploitative, extractive mode of research, have used the data they have collected without acknowledging local contributions to data collection or analysis, and have preferred to publish in journals or books that were too expensive to be accessed by those about whom, or with whose help, such research has been carried out: ‘endeavors to share research with local users is uncommon in academia, with experiences generally unpublished’ (Shanley & López, 2009: 540).

My own research career broadly follows the transformation that Nowotny et al describe, starting with sole authored reports on projects in which I framed the research questions, collected data and analysed it myself. After 1982, in fieldwork-based projects with others in rural and small-town north India, I worked with others. We hired research assistants as interpreters, translators and assistant interviewers, taking notes and writing up accounts in Hindi. The UK-based partners were co-authors on all outputs; we acknowledged the work of the assistants in footnotes. Although we were attached to Indian institutions, the Indian partners had no input into the conception of projects and how they were carried through. A joint project in the mid-1990s brought together anthropologists, foresters, historians and sociologists. Outputs from this project were led by a research fellow, with many multi-authored articles and chapters (see, for example, those in Jeffery & Sundar, 1999). Three scholars, on the basis of their contributions to the writing, were named as authors in the main book-length output; we acknowledged the contributions of others involved in the project (Sundar, Jeffery, & Thin, 2001).

Since 2005, however, I have participated in research projects funded by DFID⁴, involving economists, anthropologists, educationalists, a psychologist and sociologists in the UK and in Ghana, India, Kenya and Pakistan; two ESRC⁵-DFID funded projects with anthropologists, sociologists, an economist and a public health specialist in the UK, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal; and an EU FP7 project with pharmacists, public health specialists, anthropologists and sociologists in India, Belgium, South Africa, Switzerland and Uganda.⁶ The research proposals were each collective endeavours, but data collection, data management and data analysis have been handled differently. In some cases the local partners carried the major burden of data collection, data management, and also of drafting publications;

in others the Northern partners led on some or all of these tasks, and also provided training in research methods and mentoring in writing.

In this paper I reflect on my increasing engagement in multi-partner, multi-national and multi-disciplinary research projects that can be understood as *global assemblages*, global phenomena that have a ‘distinctive capacity for decontextualisation and recontextualisation, abstractability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life’ (Collier & Ong, 2005: 11; see also Appadurai, 1995). What happens when research projects funded by agencies in the Global North move across international boundaries into the Global South, and are reinterpreted, develop local meanings and enter into networks and relationships very different from the countries of their funding and of the original stimulus for the project? Sponsors increasingly press such projects to provide ‘evidence’ that can guide policy; Northern partners need peer-reviewed journal articles to continue their research careers; Southern partners often need project reports, in their bids for further donor-led funding.⁷ Authorship provides a lens to investigate the issues that arise as researchers attempt to meet these often conflicting expectations.

The context for this paper is provided by the multi-disciplinary nature of the projects, and the rise of an ‘audit culture’ within which differences and challenges must be negotiated. Authorship focuses attention on an increasingly contentious and significant area. For example, projects involving DFID funding must fill in a spread-sheet that asks for the identification of outputs with authors from the Global South and whether these are first-authors or are in a secondary position. In each of the four projects listed above, my colleagues and I have developed written rules about authorship: although designed to pre-empt conflicts, their use has not been straightforward, and I reflect on this experience at the end of the paper.

There is, of course, a distinct irony involved in writing a sole-authored article about the appropriate relationships involved in multiple authorship. As will become clear, while I have written this piece on my own, with advice from others, I could not have done so without the many people with whom I have collaborated for the past 10 years or more. This paper is based on my reflections on struggles to develop explicit authorship rules for the projects I have been involved in. No one else is responsible for the opinions I put forward here, and those others with whom I have worked are too numerous to be listed by

name. I believe that the issues that I raise are sufficiently significant to be worth wider consideration despite its own single authorship. I begin by describing how some of the many disciplines within the humanities and social sciences reflect on issues of authorship.

Disciplinary expectations

The conceptual spaces of disciplines are hard to classify, and there are considerable variations within disciplines in their attitude towards establishing when multiple authorship is appropriate, and on what basis. At one end of a continuum are many sciences with well-established conventions about where, for example, the head of the laboratory will appear in a list of authors – the last-named author may be who was responsible for the major part of the funding, and within whose overall intellectual project the other authors have been involved. At the other end are disciplines where multi-authored articles are rare, and contributors to the underlying research may be listed in a footnote but not as an author. An elective affinity exists between Mode 1 knowledge production and an absence of authorship conventions, but some disciplines have few explicit multi-authoring rules, despite a considerable body of work on a Mode 2 basis. Economics and sociology are two examples; there are areas within both disciplines that involve large teams, but whereas the professional ethical code of the British Sociological Association discusses this explicitly, that of the Royal Economic Society does not.

Table 1 about here

In exploring the explicit guidance I restrict myself to six disciplines in the social sciences and humanities that are relevant to my own experience: History and Social Anthropology (Mode 1, with no explicit multi-authoring rules), Sociology and Education, which encompass several forms of knowledge production and well-developed concerns with issues of authorship; and Development Economics and Public Health, closer to Mode 2. Public Health draws on a body of principles and practice developed by the editors of medical journals to acknowledge different contributions to multi-authored articles, Development Economics has given much less attention to the issue. My discussion focuses on material from the UK, but there is scope for much broader analysis of how ethical codes travel. Ethical codes for professional associations in the Global South have tended to be drawn from ex-colonial powers, reflecting continuities in social organisation that continue through independence movements and into

post-colonial settings (Johnson, 1973). More recently, American models have become more significant, and in International Associations, US scholars and funding tend to be dominant. For simplicity and the purposes of this paper, British models will be considered as the starting point.

History

In history, claims to novelty and innovation often hinge on access to new archives, or to reanalysis of known or published documents using new approaches, involving a lone scholar. The Royal Historical Society's 2004 ethical statement⁸ refers to multi-authored outputs, asking historians to give 'due and appropriate acknowledgement of assistance received, whether this concerns financial help, access to materials or an academic contribution; particular care is to be exercised when more than one author is involved'. The ethical statement of the American Historical Association has gone through several revisions, most recently in 2005. There is no explicit reference to the work of others who might have contributed to a particular output, beyond the general statement that historians 'should acknowledge their debts to the work of other scholars'.⁹ There is similarly no reference to any particular issues that might arise for historians working in other cultures. The Oral History Society's Ethical Statement assumes that the interviewer and the author are one and the same person, and there is no discussion of the appropriate treatment for authorship purposes of the work of research assistants or research fellows.¹⁰ Its framework is firmly within UK law and practice.

Social Anthropology

Ethical issues have been the subject of vigorous debate within the Association for Social Anthropology of the UK and Commonwealth [ASA] since the 1990s, and the latest ethical guidelines were approved in 2011. Although social anthropologists have historically tended to be almost exclusively in Mode 1, they are increasingly involved in development projects, and applied anthropologists in particular face issues arising from collaboration. Anthropologists cannot avoid acknowledging the significance of working in other cultures, often in the Global South.¹¹ Professor John Gledhill, then President of the ASA, wrote that he was a 'persistent advocate of the need to complete the process of decolonizing and provincializing Northern anthropologies.'¹² Anthropologists have sometimes been challenged about how they treat the contributions of local informants, interpreters and expert advisers.

The ASA code now includes the advice that ‘Care should be taken to clarify roles, rights and obligations of team members in relation to matters such as the division of labour, responsibilities, access to and rights in data and field notes, publication, co-authorship, professional liability, etc.’¹³ Missing from these debates, however, has been any explicit treatment – or actual examples – of how to recognise when ‘assistance’ turns into ‘co-production’.

Sociology

The British Sociological Association has a Statement of Ethical Practice that acknowledges debts to those of the American Sociological Association, the Social Research Association and the ASA.¹⁴ This statement has no reference to authorship, but authorship is addressed in discussions of equality on the BSA web-site. Sociologists are abjured ‘to acknowledge fully all those who contributed to their research and publications. Attribution and ordering of authorship and acknowledgements should accurately reflect the contributions of all main participants in both research and writing processes, including students.’¹⁵ Research staff should be clear about their rights. There is no specific reference to any issues that might arise while working in other countries or cultures.

Development Economics

The Development Studies Association is the main focus for activities of economists of development in the UK. Its web-site offers no ethical guidelines, nor do either of the British journals most closely associated with the discipline, the *Journal of International Development* and the *Journal of Development Studies*. The advice on authorship provided by the Royal Economics Society is contained in the advice for authors in the *Economic Journal*, which includes the following:

All co-authors share joint responsibility for content of the research and the submitted manuscript.

Other significant contributors to the research are to be acknowledged as such on the manuscript.¹⁶

The exclusive licence form that must be filled in before final acceptance of an article states that ‘all co-authors have read and agreed the terms of this Agreement’. Concern for who is entitled to be included within the list of authors, and any recognition that this may be more problematic in work involving authors from the Global South, does not seem to have received attention from the Journal’s editors.

Public health is concerned mainly with interventions – such as vaccinations, treatment models or changes to the environment – in which ethics, politics and law are inevitably involved. *Public Health Ethics* has attempted to make discussions of ethics in public health more systematic (see, for example, Singh, 2010). The ethical guidelines for the Faculty of Public Health state that ‘when publishing results you must not make unjustified claims for authorship’ – but this seems to refer to avoiding plagiarism.¹⁷ Public health physicians are also directed to the General Medical Council, whose detailed guidelines cover a wide range of topics.¹⁸ But the major source of guidance on publications can be found in the advice from dominant journals, such as the *Journal of Public Health*, an official publication of the Faculty of Public Health, provides advice on authorship as follows:

All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship. The order of authorship should be a joint decision of the co-authors. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for the content. Authorship credit should be based on substantial contribution to conception and design, execution, or analysis and interpretation of data. All authors should be involved in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, and must have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. Assurance that all authors of the paper have fulfilled these criteria for authorship should be given in the covering letter.¹⁹

Surprisingly, the *Journal of Public Health* has not officially adopted the model of asking for specific details on what form the contribution took for each of the listed authors. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has a long statement on authorship.²⁰ These guidelines distinguish between *Authors* who ‘must take responsibility for at least one component of the work, should be able to identify who is responsible for each other component, and should ideally be confident in their co-authors’ ability and integrity’; *Contributors* who have participated in a submitted study, but not sufficiently to qualify as authors; and a *Guarantor*, who is responsible for the integrity of the work as a whole. They further (and somewhat confusingly) continue:

Authorship credit should be based on 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the article or revising it

critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, *and* 3 [my emphasis].

The guidance clarifies that ‘Acquisition of funding, collection of data, or general supervision of the research group alone does not constitute authorship’ and deals with the issues raised by large group projects. The key concerns are for the integrity of the work as a whole, in situations where many people may have made contributions to the final product.

Education

Education has engaged clearly with the issue of multi-country research, and is multi-disciplinary in nature. In the UK, the British Educational Research Association [BERA] has developed comprehensive ethical guidelines and has recently been concerned to take seriously ‘culturally sensitive issues’. Interestingly, however, it also takes the view that UK ethical standards should be applied even in the presence of a partner country’s own provisions, particularly with respect to informed consent and the protection of vulnerable respondents: ‘Where the overseas research involves children or vulnerable adults, the researchers must comply with the child protection clearance procedures of the UK.’²¹

The BERA guidelines offer a clear statement of what is involved in authorship. Clause 48 states:

The authorship of publications is considered to comprise a list of everyone who has made a substantive and identifiable contribution to their generation. Examples of substantive contributions include: contributing generative ideas, conceptual schema or analytic categories; writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or editing; contributing significantly to relevant literature reviewing; and contributing to data collection, to its analysis and to judgements and interpretations made in relation to it.²²

The American Educational Research Association [AERA] takes a similar line, but adds that ‘Education researchers ensure that principal authorship, authorship order, and other publication credits are based on the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their status. Education researchers specify the criteria for making these determinations at the outset of the

writing process’ and that ‘A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored publication that substantially derives from the student’s dissertation or thesis’ (AERA, 2011: 153-4)

These disciplines present different approaches to ethical issues in general, and to issues of authorship and intellectual property in particular. The dominant paradigm of data collection in History and Social Anthropology is that of the individual scholar and fieldworker: they are the means by which knowledge is generated and captured. Methodological debates in these disciplines acknowledge the creative and interpretive roles played by researchers but do not develop appropriate responses to problems that arise when historians or anthropologists work in teams or with assistants who bring creative elements to data collection and analysis. The dominant paradigm of data collection in Economics and Public Health, by contrast, is that data are collected by research assistants whose personality has, as far as possible, been removed from the research process. ‘Ticking boxes’ in a structured questionnaire is to be as replicable as possible, even if this is achieved with some loss of validity. Sociology and Education have had to confront both research styles, and have developed (at least in the UK) a generalised preference for ‘qualitative methods’ (see for example the regular breast-beating about the lack of quantitative papers in Sociology journals, cited in Byrne, 2012). Within the qualitative research traditions, and the use of semi-structured interviews and participant or semi-structured observation in particular, researchers usually acknowledge that they are unavoidably the research instrument. Creative work – or a ‘substantive and identifiable contribution’ – is therefore logically contributed by any researcher hired to conduct such interviews or observations. These different disciplines thus generate very different expectations for researchers of involvement in the process of writing, and I now turn to the contexts within which research projects are managed, and the processes out of which publications come.

Audit culture and academic products in the UK

These discussions have particular resonance in the UK because the rise of an academic audit regime started earlier and has gone further here than in most other parts of the world:

Audit regimes accompany a specific epoch in Western international affairs, a period when governance has become reconfigured through a veritable army of ‘moral fieldworkers’ (NGOs),

when environmental liability has been made an issue of global concern (after the Rio convention), when the ethics of appropriation has been acknowledged to an unprecedented scale in respect of indigenous rights, and when transparency of operation is everywhere endorsed as the outward sign of integrity (Strathern, 2000: 2).

Here I focus only on the significance for university finances of national UK research assessment exercises, undertaken since 1986 in response to funding cuts. One implication is that publications from multi-disciplinary and multi-national research look unattractive unless authors in UK university posts can place them in international peer-reviewed journals with a small number of co-authors (preferably from a different institution) and themselves able to claim the major part of the credit for the item (if possible, as first-named author).

The procedures have been contentious, and have attracted much opposition, though most university-based academics have learned to live with them. In earlier exercises (prior to 2008) the assessment of any unit was based almost entirely on a grading of the items of work submitted to one of the subject panels and authored by staff employed from funds provided by the Government in direct grants to Universities or other higher education institutes. One seldom-noticed aspect of the procedures is that this excludes those on temporary contracts funded from research grants – those most involved in the research process. This places a pressure on permanent staff to attach their names to work authored by their research assistants and fellows; although this is normal where Mode 2 knowledge production is normative, it raises tricky questions for disciplines (such as history or social anthropology) where research fellows are expected to work independently.

It is now virtually impossible to reconstruct processes of assessment, given the commitments to confidentiality entered into by Panel members, but there is an impression that single-authored work, and especially single-authored monographs, received additional value in assessments undertaken up to 2008. Panels may have reviewed the range of outputs submitted to them in terms of a balance between journal articles, book chapters, books and other forms of output, along with the balance between single-authored and multi-authored work. The evidence available within the public sphere is insufficient to judge how significant such judgements have been. But for the disciplines where ‘Mode 1’ forms of knowledge

production predominate, informal conversations with members of panels suggest that the single-authored monograph was assumed to be the blue riband of items for submission.

In the current exercise, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) has shifted from earlier policy and practice. The guidance offered by Main Panel C (very roughly, the social sciences) to submitting institutions,²³ explicitly addresses the issue of inter-disciplinary work, as well as ‘Co-authored and co-produced outputs’, welcoming them and expecting to see many such items submitted to it. The panel guidance states that in assessing a co-authored output, ‘The order of authors will not be taken into account in the assessment process, as conventions in this regard vary between subject areas’ (Para 45). Warning that multiple submission of the same item is not advised, it requires explicit justification, with a risk that the item will only be considered once (Para 53). Finally, in considering the option that an institution might want to ‘double-weight’ one item (by implication, a research monograph), it implies that such work should be single-authored (Para 53).²⁴

As noted above, the work of those not on contracts funded by the UK funding councils cannot be submitted unless it is co-authored by someone who is. Such marginalisation applies even more clearly to the work of overseas partners. In addition, there is an explicit assumption that what is of interest takes place *within* the UK institution:

47. Sub-panels wish to receive the fullest possible picture of a submitted unit’s research activity and advise that, if additional outputs of comparable quality will give a wider picture of research in the submitting unit, an item of co-authored work should be submitted only once within a single submission.

This approach raises the issue of what kind of solidarity is expected to exist for co-members of an academic department or unit, or of a research group (Strathern, 2003: 167-8). As the number of those contributing to an article rise, so the relationships among them and the need for someone to take overall responsibility for its contents has exercised journal editors and a ‘guarantor’ is required to embody this solidarity in as yet unexamined ways. Because such solidarities – derived from different national, disciplinary or other experiences – vary so much, assumptions about what individuals owe to their collaborators in advance, or to police in retrospect, are unreliable.

The emergent academic audit culture privileges social practices that ‘will persuade those to whom accountability is to be rendered—whether it is “the government” or the taxpayer/public—that accountability has indeed been rendered’ (Strathern, 2000: 1-2). The UK research assessment exercises have codified and extended the accountability of university academic staff to their employers, providing managers with an additional means of controlling what faculty members write and publish. These regular assessments add a further element to authorship decisions: the preferred submissions are those which can be attributed to a single author – i.e., for Mode 1 knowledge production. At the same time, UK funding councils in the social sciences have increasingly called for Mode 2 forms of knowledge production, and the resulting tensions are still in process of being resolved, with – at the front of such pressures – DFID pushing not only for publications to be open-access, but for authors (and preferably, first authors) to be from ‘Developing Country Staff.’

But the pressures on partners in the Global South may be very different: ‘the dependency on donor agencies for funding research activities poses risks for the independence of academic research, forcing academics to tailor their research depending on donor needs. This dependency is not sustainable, as research is carried out not on a continuous basis but whenever the funds are available’ (Papoutsaki, 2008, cited in Teichler & Yağcı, 2009). Papoutsaki takes this argument further, suggesting that ‘capacity development’ in international research projects takes place often more in the North than in the South:

‘Research into donor-based programmes of ‘cooperation’ between institutions from the North and South has indicated an inequality in the relationship. ‘Because the Northern donor provides the funding, ... knowledge, ... often decides on the model and activities to be chosen, despite the fact that the Southern institution is obviously being better placed to determine the needs and priorities’... The Northern institutions benefit from these programmes in terms of the internationalization of courses, attracting researchers, establishing collaborations with partner institutions in the South, and getting access to research grounds in developing countries’ (Papoutsaki, 2008: 247, cited in Teichler & Yağcı, 2009: 102).

In combination, these trends place increasing pressures on research managers of multi-disciplinary, multi-national projects to negotiate a minefield of contradictory expectations. I turn now to some examples of how these expectations have been managed in the projects which I have led or taken part.

Policy and practice in research projects

Authorship has been explicitly addressed through discussions early in the projects noted above, usually at inception workshops. After details of methodology and research design have been taken from research proposals and operationalized, a rather awkward discussion on authorship has also taken place, leading to (or, in later projects, amending) a document setting out guidelines (see <http://www.bhesa.org/publications>). These guidelines have emerged in response to actual and expected areas of dispute, and have been hybrids, attempting to relate to more than one disciplinary approach. They have addressed how the project as a whole should be acknowledged, before stating general rules that have stressed the need to protect the interests of junior researchers who make inputs into research design, data collection, management and analysis, while also acknowledging the contributions of senior members of the team who may make significant contributions to writing. The expectation that outputs will be multi-authored is explicit. In addition, and crucially for this discussion, outputs based on the material collected in any particular country must include as an author at least one national, based in that country. The reverse has also been established: that at least one author from the North should be included in every output that draws on the conceptual work and guidance provided by whoever was responsible for a particular sub-field of enquiry. Where an output is comparative, each country should be represented by at least one author. No-one had a pre-emptive right to be an author, neither the Principal Investigator in the North nor the leader of each of the country teams.

Although these guidelines seemed, at the time, to cover most eventualities, in practice lacunae remained, visible at different points through the process of carrying out the research. In only one case were these guidelines seriously challenged at the time of drafting, by a scholar who objected to the *obligation* to publish with an author from the country where the research was carried out, rather than a generalised expectation that this would happen. The other problems emerged later. Four anonymised vignettes illustrate some of the problems that have arisen.

1. A Northern researcher relied heavily on a local assistant (with a Master's qualification) for the management of the project in a Southern country. The first output (in a Southern, open-access journal) was co-authored with the assistant. The Northern researcher then signed a contract

for a book, in which this article would have formed the basis for one chapter. Should the Southern assistant be a co-author of the book? Of the relevant chapter only? Or merely acknowledged?

- 2.A Northern researcher conceptualised a sub-project, trained local assistants and developed the interview guide. The local assistants were selected and managed by a Southern Associate Professor, who was elusive, rarely answering emails and failing to attend some sessions to discuss analysis and writing. When the first output was drafted by the Northern academic, the Southern academic – despite repeated attempts – failed to comment. The Northern academic included the Southern as an author, in accordance with the guidelines, while protesting to the PI that this was inequitable.
- 3.A Northern and two Southern researchers jointly drafted a paper of which the publication was delayed. In the interim, one of the Southern researchers published a slightly edited version of this article as a sole author in a local journal, without the knowledge of the project PI or either of the original co-authors.
- 4.A Northern researcher worked with local colleagues in developing a comparative study of policy. In two of the Southern countries, partners were stable and assisted in co-authoring outputs. In one of the other two Southern countries, a partner was hired as a consultant, and left the project before it was completed; a second consultant also made minimal inputs. In the fourth country, the consultant made minor contributions. Who should be included in the final comparative publications?

The difficulties that are highlighted in these examples (out of many other possibilities) reflect: differences in capacity and ability to engage with the requirements of international peer-reviewed journals or book chapters; varying and temporary engagements with the project; different priorities for academic and research careers.

To take the most obvious of these first: in order to contribute fully to the development of the research proposals, and to specify the research questions and research design, partners need relevant career experiences, access to the most recent academic literature and the time and ability to contribute to the development of publications. There are major constraints imposed by the large capacity differentials

that exist between collaborating institutions in the North and the South, and between different collaborators in the South (particularly between India and sub-Saharan Africa). While access to electronic sources in the Global South is growing, it is inadequate for full engagement in literature surveys and referencing. Academic staff at UK universities cannot let overseas partners access their own universities' subscriptions. Visits by partners to the UK are rarely long enough to allow partners to catch up. The overseas partner may, of course provide access to grey literature and other resources not easily available over the Internet, but there is less and less of a local advantage as more 'grey' material is posted on web-sites.

Since the number of well-trained social science researchers in some parts of the Global South is limited, investigators from the Global North may need to establish new research partners – especially if they are developing multi-disciplinary groupings. Local partners usually bring a greater familiarity with local research settings, but may have fewer technical skills than partners from the Global North. They are frequently in much weaker employment situations, more likely to have to hustle either for new jobs or new contracts as one contract winds down. At the other extreme, some partners in the Global South may receive attractive offers to leave academia and move into consultancy work, with donor agencies, commercial firms or international NGOs, either within the country or abroad. They may leave a research project before its conclusion, and then become unavailable to help write up the research. Junior researchers may stay only for a year or two before leaving to take up PhD studentships or leave academic work altogether. Such rapid turnover of staff not only makes the project more difficult to complete, but also poses problems for maintaining the 'solidarity' that is required for collective efforts towards defining an output and seeing it through to a conclusion. Those still engaged in producing outputs – usually after the end of the direct funding – have to make strenuous efforts to ensure that the appropriate people review and take responsibility for the published work.

These concerns are, of course, also to be found in projects carried out entirely within the Global North, but my contention is that they are more significant and problematic in projects that include partners in the Global South. As a result, collaboration inevitably involves Northerners doing most of the writing, with the Southerners being more in an 'assistant' role. Such differences have been central to the

experience of these projects, with Northern researchers being tempted to ‘take over’ the writing. This has affected the number and quality of outcomes strongly. Sometimes quality has been sacrificed in the interests of collegiality; more often, outputs have been delayed or abandoned because of the conflicts between what seems likely to produce a ‘high quality’ output, and the interests in maintaining the spirit of the authorship guidelines. DFID wish to encourage a particular vision of development to be achieved through the research they support, one that involves building capacity through first authorship, or at least co-authorship. Since the Northern partners are often involved in several projects, they are tempted to shift the focus of their attention to projects where it is possible to publish in ways that are more acceptable to their disciplinary REF panel.

An exception to this generalisation is the experience of those whose data collection methods are more formulaic. Development economists hire field staff for short periods, train them in administering questionnaires, and then withdraw with their data to their home institution for data management and analysis. In my work, along with other sociologists, social anthropologists, and education researchers, staff were hired for longer periods, trained in generic skills, and asked to engage creatively with the research in order to carry out successful semi-structured interviews or periods of observation. For development economists – and for many in public health – it is normal for ‘hired hands’ to be excluded from authorship, and publications from one project went ahead without including a member of the project based in the relevant country, but sometimes with a national who was resident and employed in the UK. In these circumstances, the contribution of the project to capacity development ‘in country’ is hard to discern.

There have also been challenges in agreeing on the kinds of outputs that should take priority. Local partners have wished to produce research reports or policy briefs that engage with short-term political imperatives, and involve different priorities, such as the development of Five Year Plans, donor conferences, or new Education Policy statements. Meeting such expectations can have major benefits for future contracts or consultancy work for the local partners, and often clash with the project research timetable. But doing so has exhausted their commitment to the projects, as staff are moved onto new

projects, and new staff are hired in place of those who contributed to the old projects, and contact with them is lost.

Finally, and most contentious, have been disputes over who should be included in a particular list of authors. Some social science journals and book publishers operate a much more restrictive approach to who may be included in a list of authors: the fewer the better. Partners from the Global North have been happy to include partners from the Global South, but journal editors or editorial policies sometimes stand in the way of full inclusion.

The main conclusion to be drawn from my experience is that to avoid marginalising partners from the Global South takes a considerable effort. Junior staff may not come to learn of publications to which they have been contributors until well after they have left the project. Holding to agreed guidelines in the face of pressures from authors, publishers and departmental staff concerned to maximise REF returns is highly problematic.

By way of a Conclusion: Postcolonialism, disciplines and accountability

In the early modern period, 'The author was not seen as a creative producer whose work deserved protection from piracy, but as the person upon whose door the police would knock if those texts were deemed subversive or heretical' (Biagioli, 1999: 3) but it has now become a key symbol of scientific esteem. The issues raised by multi-authorship – especially when multi-authorship crosses national and disciplinary boundaries – have become personal as well as public. As Biagioli puts it, 'practitioners' perceptions of due credit and responsibility may be informed by their location and role within a collaborative project' and 'the geographical variability of attitudes about authorship is downplayed by the fact that the term science tends to cast an aura of homogeneity on a vast range of diverse disciplines and differently situated individuals and institutions' (1999: 7). His example is biomedicine, and he is concerned with high-profile cases where directors of laboratories have insisted on 'honorific' or 'gift' authorship of key papers. Similar concerns still need to be resolved as multi-partner, multi-national and multi-disciplinary teams address common problems in the social sciences, but with very different expectations on authorship.

Although the issues raised in this paper emerge in research partnerships based entirely in the Global North, debates within postcolonialism remind us that hidden – and not-so-hidden – structures of inequality are more pronounced when the North-South relationships are involved. While they are hard to resolve within single disciplinary teams, they become almost impossible if some members of the team play by one set of rules, while others feel constrained to play by others. There is no simple solution to these dilemmas, but investigators – particularly those leading multi-disciplinary and multi-national teams, and facing conflicting expectations in the UK's audit culture – must find ways to address them. And unless disciplinary bodies make explicit what they would like to see happen, they may find that an unholy cabal of journal editors and funding bodies make the decisions for them.

Table 1: Example classification of disciplines

	Mode 1: lone scholar	Mode 2: collective research
Multi-authoring rare	History Social Anthropology	Development Economics
Explicit multi-author rules	Medicine Life Sciences	Sociology Education

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Notes

¹ All simple classifications are misleading, but for convenience I use the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South,’ respectively, to refer to countries that have higher per capita Gross Domestic Products and are in the top quartile of Human Development rankings (largely, but not exclusively, countries in Europe, North America, East Asia and Australasia) and those with lower incomes and HDI rankings, largely but not exclusively in the rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

² Disciplines also vary in the expectations about graduate students, and whether in their early publications their supervisors should be co-authors. While this raises some concerns about power differentials, they are normally resolved within disciplines and according to the norms of the degree-granting country and institution, and I do not consider these issues further here.

³ Since 2009, known as the Research Excellence Framework

⁴ DFID, the Department for International Development, is the UK Government’s ministry for international assistance, now called UKAID.

⁵ ESRC, the Economic and Social Research Council, is the UK Government’s arms-length body for funding social science research.

⁶ I have also been a member of a Review Panel for a complex multi-disciplinary project involving four continents, eight Swiss institutions, and physical, medical and social scientists, in which publication in English was stressed as the primary indicator of academic output by the funding council.

⁷ The leading proponent of social research to affect policy in the Global South is the Abdul Jameel Latif Poverty Action Lab, based at MIT in Cambridge, Boston, USA. See <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/course/agenda> for more information.

⁸ Downloaded from <http://www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/aboutus.php> on 01 August 2012.

⁹ <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/professionalstandards.cfm>, accessed 01 August 2012.

¹⁰ <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/ethics/index.php> accessed on 06 August 2012

¹¹ The ESRC, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Foreign and Commonwealth combined to support a £2.4 million initiative on radicalisation and political violence. See http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/EC_Executive_Summary_NCSRV_tcm8-22040.pdf which notes the unexpected hostility – involving leading anthropologists among others – that greeted the original call for research proposals under this scheme.

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- ¹² <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/discussion1.shtml>, accessed on 01 August 2012
- ¹³ Downloaded from <http://www.theasa.org/ethics.shtml> on 01 August 2012.
- ¹⁴ Downloaded from <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf> on 06 August 2012
- ¹⁵ <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/issues-for-bsa-members.aspx> accessed on 06 August 2012
- ¹⁶ Downloaded from <http://www.res.org.uk/view/ethicspolicyEconomic.html> on 02 August 2012
- ¹⁷ Downloaded from http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/B_GPHP.pdf on 02 August 2012
- ¹⁸ Downloaded from http://www.gmc-uk.org/static/documents/content/Research_guidance_FINAL.pdf on 02 August 2012
- ¹⁹ http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/pubmed/for_authors/general.html, accessed on 02 August 2012.
- ²⁰ http://www.icmje.org/ethical_1author.html last accessed 02 August 2012. ICMJE is the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.
- ²¹ Downloaded from <http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources> on 02 August 2012
- ²² Downloaded from <http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources> on 02 August 2012
- ²³ Downloaded from http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref/content/pub/panelcriteriaandworkingmethods/01_12_2C.pdf.
- ²⁴ The draft notes were more explicit. Its Para 59 read: 'In highly exceptional cases the sub-panels may accept claims to double-weight co-authored outputs.'